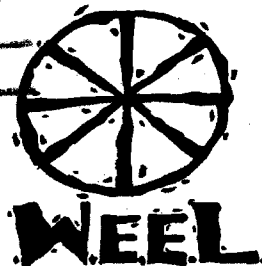


EXHIBIT 11
DATE 2/19/07



To: Public Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee
From: WEEL – Olivia Riutta – oriutta@weelempowers.org, 406.495.0497.
Date: February 19, 2007
Re: House Bill 575 – Revise TANF Laws

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am here today as a representative of WEEL. We are a state based non-profit organization that provides direct advocacy to low-income Montanans. We are membership based and one of them is here to testify today.

In the past few years we have seen dramatic changes to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. We are concerned because since July of 2002, the caseload has decreased by over 47%, but our rate of children in poverty has continued to grow, currently 20% of all Montana kids, and as much as 44% for Native American children.

Families are moving off of TANF because the program no longer supports them in moving out of poverty. The current TANF benefit for a family of three is \$65 less than it was in 2002, but five years later. In those five years we have seen housing costs skyrocket, energy prices increase, and the real dollar value of that benefit dwindle in the face of inflation. Not only have benefits decreased, but parents are now required to work more hours, with restrictions on work activities, and face tighter sanctions.

HB 575 is a common sense solution because it rewards families that are working. It incentivizes work. Working families on TANF would be able to disregard a little bit more of their earning each month, maintaining a higher cash benefit, about \$75.00 more a month for a family of three. We are not making these families rich, only giving them more flexibility so that when their car battery is dead, they can buy a new one and drive to work.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we urge you to support these hard-working families on TANF and urge a due pass on HB 575.

Thank you,

Olivia Riutta